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The Basics and Beyond

RSV . . . NRSV

In preparing my recent Bible study for "The Unshakable Kingdom: A Study of Hebrews," I was shocked to discover that the authors have chosen to use the RSV [Revised Standard Version] Bible translation as the text for their presentation. The RSV talks only to "brethren," speaks of Jesus bringing "sons to glory," and says that Jesus "had to be made like his brethren" in order to become a faithful high priest. Especially in study material aimed at women in this important topic of Jesus becoming like us, male and female, it would seem to me necessary to use a nonsexist text such as the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]. As women we need to be able to read ourselves unequivocally into the biblical texts without constantly having to translate ourselves first into some sort of pseudo-males. Doesn't Women of the ELCA have a policy position on nonsexist language?

Bea Beyerhelm
Iowa City, Iowa

Yes, Women of the ELCA is committed to inclusivity and to helping women see themselves as full partners in God's gospel and church.

As a general policy, the NRSV is the main translation used in materials the organization produces. For "The Unshakable Kingdom" the authors requested an exception. They share some of their reasoning below.—ED

There are many good translations of the Bible, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. The use of inclusive language is one, but only one criterion by which a translation should be evaluated. In the Bible study that appeared in the February LWT, we invited participants to discuss some of the issues involved in translation by considering reasons for retaining the traditional expression "son of man" (RSV) and for replacing it with "mortals" (NRSV) in Hebrews 2:6. The RSV has been widely used by Lutherans over the years. It is accurate and generally reads well. We assume participants will use various versions in their study and encourage them to select one that best meets their needs.

Craig and Nancy Koester
St. Paul, Minnesota

Letters, continued on inside back cover

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"We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul . . ." (Hebrews 6:19).

How good of Hebrews to remind us so strongly of that bedrock of our faith: a God who grounds us in hope for the future, made ours through Christ, our high priest.

That bedrock—"the basics," this issue calls it—is key to our life as Christians. What are some of these basics? Mike Cobbler says knowing our need for God tops the list (p. 34). Nancy Koester, in "Who Needs Creeds?" shows just how ancient—and modern—creeds can be as they shape us within a community of faith (p. 13). How we form the faith—preparing adults for baptism and young people for affirmation of baptism—is basic to congregational life (see pp. 36, 39).

Guidance about what is basic comes, we learn, from all kinds of faithful believers. From church historian Martin Marty, who deftly navigates the waters between "The Fundamentals and Fundamentalism" (p. 10). And from five-year-old Seth, the "bath-tub theologian" who asks his mom if she knows "God loves everybody, even the bad guys?" (p. 18). And newborn Ashley is the occasion for reminding her parents—and all of us—that Baptism is the great unifier of our faith (p. 21).

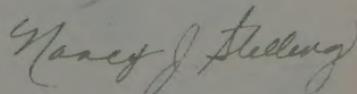
But Hebrews—thank goodness, and thank God—never leaves well

enough alone! It is always pushing the edges, nudging us further in the faith, exhorting us to "leave behind the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity" (6:1). The basics of faith are like a field of garden flowers, forming a framework for our beliefs. Yet, within that simple framework each flower has a nuance of its own—beckoning us to explore and discover the rich tapestry behind.

It is, says Marge Wold in "Speaking of the Basics," our Bible study and our wrestling with the Word that catapult us out of our too comfortable faith paths "into those places where the cross looms as a possibility" (p. 4). If we can't go with God into those places, perhaps we have "wasted a lot of time in Bible study," she concludes.

So "What is the quality of our hope?" asks Chris Grumm as she seeks to stir us to discussion of some of the deeper, more difficult questions of our faith. She bids us to trust that Jesus' promise to be with us always will allow our faith to grow and bloom in ways we never thought possible.

Happy blooming.



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Photo by Michael Lilja
Minneapolis, MN

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or the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to
Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked, at their conclusion, with
these symbols: **A**=action, **C**=community and **G**=growth.

Editor
Nancy J. Stelling

Managing Editor
Sue Edison-Swift

Assistant Editor
Cynthia J. Mickelson

Production Editor
Amy Boxrud

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Margarita Rojas

Graphic Design
Lilja Baehr Design

Guest Planner
Tracie M. Steele

Art & Photos:
Eswitha Dinger, LWF, 7-9; Lilja Baehr Design, 18-20; 31;
Steven J. Nerheim, 22-23; Sue Edison-Swift, 36.

Speaking of the Basics

Margaret Barth Wold

¡Buenos dias! ¿Como esta usted?

Every other year for 10 years, I have studied basic Spanish all over again! Having taken Latin and French in high school and majored in Greek in college, I felt I had a natural aptitude for languages.

Now my problem is that I really want to be able to converse in Spanish. But it seems I never practice my book-learning enough in real-life situations.

What's my point? Well, since I have to keep taking refresher courses in basic Spanish, I never seem to get beyond the ABCs. There's no way I can converse comfortably.

Jesus laid out his basic: "love one another as I have loved you." Unless we get to that place as Christians, haven't we wasted a lot of time in Bible study?

one has, or creates, opportunities to practice? That's exactly what the writer of *Hebrews* is trying to say, then and now. Those to whom *Hebrews* was written never grew beyond the infant stage in understanding what it means to follow Jesus. By this time, says the author, they should be "eating meat," that is, knowing more than the ABCs of the faith.

The people to whom *Hebrews* was written must have loved to retreat from their pagan society into the warm, cozy fellowship of other believers! They knew the basic doctrines well—all about the necessity of repentance from dead works and of faith in the God of the Scriptures. They understood Baptism as an entrance into the faith community and the laying on of hands as a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. They believed, not just in the immortality of the soul, as did many of their contemporaries in other religions, but they looked forward in Christian hope to the resurrection of the body and to a time when an accounting of their deeds would have to be made to God.

How important these basic doctrines are! Try living

the Christian life without them! They are basic to any spiritual growth. What those early readers, and we, need to learn is that they are just the beginnings of faith.

Many of us learned this past year just how basic some things are, like pure water, gas and electricity, food, clothing and a roof. Then floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and fires sweep these away, the simple act of bathing, going to the toilet or brushing teeth becomes a major production.

Without food, water, shelter and clothing, human life as we have come to know it cannot exist. Our Lord Jesus, knowing all this, includes the basics in his prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread. . ." Martin Luther says in the small Catechism that "daily bread" means "everything needed for this life, such as food and clothing, home and property, work and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favorable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbors."

Until we have the basics, we cannot move on. But move on we must, according to *Hebrews*. No one stays in one spot. We either move toward maturity—or slide backward into "apostasy"—a falling away from faith in Jesus. We wonder the harshness of this warning.

Is it possible we can fall away simply because we—enlightened, spirit-filled, gifted, students of the scriptures with a host of gifts and graces—never move out into those places where the cross looms as a possibility? Maybe we need to stop clarifying and debating the same doctrinal questions over and over

again, and start doing deeds of love. Start risking in order to share these basic truths and all that we have learned through experience. Start daring to defend the unloved and oppressed as Jesus did. And, if necessary, start putting our own lives in jeopardy by taking up Christ's cross. Do we not need to go beyond memorizing the catechism and Bible verses and start walking in the steps of Jesus, the Word made flesh?

For Jesus, Christian faith and doctrine can be summed up in his command to "love one another as I have loved you." Unless we get to that place as Christians, haven't we wasted a lot of time in Bible study? We are believers in a God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" not only to die for us but also to show us how to live!

Maybe some day I might even be able to converse with my Spanish-speaking amigas. I hope so because, otherwise, though Spanish classes have been fun, I've sure wasted a lot of time on grammar!

Adios, amigas. G

Dr. Margaret Barth Wold is a senior mentor and retired professor at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California. She teaches in the religion department at CLU and does free-lance speaking and writing.



What Is the Quality of Our Christian Hope?

Christine H. Grumm

The march began from the front porch of home in Monrovia, Liberia. The cry rang out in the neighborhood that the soldiers were coming and, if you valued your life, you would leave immediately. Robert, the patriarch of the family, already had left for work that day and had not been heard from. So Mary, the family matriarch, gathered up the rest of the clan, numbering 40, and on foot, with babies and children in hand, began their search for safe sanctuary.

Along their 35-mile trek as they passed one military checkpoint after another, family members were interrogated, their few possessions and money taken and their lives threatened. It looked as if there was no end in sight for this journey through hell.

Mary put her entire family in the hands of God, and in a desperate attempt to end their suffering and mental anguish, she confronted the soldiers, challenging them to find shelter for this rag-tag group of refugees. She knew the soldiers could easily choose to kill the whole family right there along the roadside.

But finally they were directed to an old abandoned house and there this family of 40 stayed for the next three months. Though they continued to be harassed by the soldiers and ate only what food they could find growing wild on the land, at least they were together. For that miracle they praised God.

Two months went by—and still no word from Robert. They assumed him dead. As the war raged on and thousands were being killed, they huddled together in the abandoned house, waiting. Waiting, and still believing that a sign of hope would emerge. Mary, weakened from lack of food, lay on a mat on the floor, hope diminishing as her weight did. Yet, while its bright light grew weaker, the hope that God was still present in their lives was never completely extinguished.

One day while lying on her place on the floor, Mary

thought she heard Robert's voice. Yes, although almost unrecognizable due to the rigors of detention camp, Robert had finally found his way back to the family! Within a month, they returned to their home in Monrovia with all 40 family members, and found it stripped of most of its possessions and destroyed almost beyond recognition. But, their lives had been spared and for that miracle, too, they were thankful.

Eighteen months later as a guest in their renovated home, I sat on the front lawn in the fading light of dusk as Mary and Robert recounted their story of struggle and pain—and their discovery of a hope so deep that it stood the test. The story, told through tears and laughter, mirrors the experience of more than 70 percent of the Liberian population throughout their now four-year-old war. As they continue to rebuild their lives, they share that hope with the surrounding neighbors.

While Monrovia continues to be without electricity and water, and under a 7 P.M. to 7 A.M. curfew, in his family the quality of hope is certainly a witness to their strong faith in God's promise to accompany them on their journey. For while much of the world community seems to ignore the bloody conflict in Liberia, God stubbornly refuses to abandon the people of this ravaged country.

I wondered as I sat listening to their story if my Christian hope were deep enough to survive such an experience. How long would my hope have held out? Has my faith matured to such an extent that I would have been as strong as Mary? Most of us in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will never have to face the kind of life-and-death decisions Mary and Robert's family did. However, are we not continuously being called upon to test the maturity of our faith, and thereby the depth and quality of our hope? For it is out of a deepened understanding of our Christian hope that we can throw caution to the wind and risk all in the name of our resurrected Jesus.

For most of us, our risk-taking will be confined to the way we live with each other as the people of God. Part of that living together is the ability to accept our diversity and to



Displaced Liberian children live in camps that used to be army barracks.

learn to listen to one another. As I look at the various regional conflicts in the world—such as Liberia, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia—I am increasingly aware of how the lack of listening and an unwillingness to accept differences has caused the destruction of entire countries and the death of thousands. In our own lives, where is the depth and quality of Christian hope that enables us to open our hearts and minds to all the possibilities of God's creation?

As the people of God explore how the Good News is lived out in each of our lives, we are taking a risk that we might be changed by the experience. For after all, a



Bullet holes pockmark the wall of the Lutheran Church in Liberia guest house.

maturing faith does mean that we become changed people. Maturing in faith enriches and deepens our understanding of how we as Christians boldly face the world in our daily lives.

Too often we fall back on our "childlike faith," as if God meant for this basic understanding to be the end, rather than a starting, point of our faith life. Rather, as we gain more knowledge and experience, we are to bring maturity to our beliefs and new insights to how the Gospel story works in our lives. This maturity helps us accept the truth that we, as individuals may not have all the answers. It is a maturity that allows us to risk all, knowing that wherever we find ourselves at the end of the debate, we will not be there alone. God stands with us in all of our wanderings. Therefore, we should not be afraid to explore all the possibilities of the Christian life, even though God never promised easy or ready answers.

Over these next months and years, we in the ELCA have many difficult issues to study and deliberate as Christians. For starters, the sexuality study, homosexuality, justice and peace concerns, living with other faiths, and witnessing in a world that seems—by many of its violent actions—to have rejected God's presence. Each one of us could shape a lengthy list of things that need Christian discussion and conversation. Whatever is on our lists, the question remains: Do we as a Christian community have the depth and

quality of hope that makes us willing to risk the conversations?

No single person in the church has all the answers; if someone tries to convince us otherwise, we need to be suspicious of that person's motives. Rather, we as a mature Christian community need to deliberate and struggle with one another, and with the help of the Holy Spirit we will find answers that will help us live together as the people of God.

The easy way out, of course, is to put our heads in the sand and wish the difficult questions would just go away. Or to get angry with each other for even putting the issue on the church's agenda! Yet, think of all the women surrounding Jesus who asked the hard questions: the woman at the well, the bent-over women, Mary Magdalene. Theirs were questions that focused on such controversial issues as adultery, sexuality and the empowerment of marginalized people. And while many of the disciples were quite content to push such concerns to the side, Jesus remained firm in his openness to the women's struggles. He encouraged and pushed his disciples to dig deep for answers. So, too, as maturing Christians, we are urged to see beyond the basics.

As a church we would do well to ask ourselves the question, "What is the quality of our Christian hope?" Do we not, at this time in history, have the opportunity to show the world how a diverse Christian community can talk about controversial issues and still live together as a family? To do this we must, like Mary and her family in Liberia, put ourselves in the hands of God. We need to ask the hard questions no matter how much it scares us. Finally, we need to be willing to trust that the quality of our hope in the resurrected Jesus, and his promise to be with us always, is deep enough to allow our faith to grow in ways we never thought possible. GCA

Christine Grumm is deputy general secretary for the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva, Switzerland.



A school for war orphans operates on an island within the Monrovia swamps.



The Fundamentals & Fundamentalism

Martin E. Marty

Fundamentally, the fundamentals of faith come in the form of a story: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets" and in these last days "by a Son." God has added testimony "by the gifts of the Holy Spirit," and, says the writer to the Hebrews, we must pay "attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it."

Secondarily, the fundamentals of faith come in the form of teaching which, for those who like things nailed down, is called "doctrine" or "dogma." We pay attention, baptize and commune to become part of the story and make it the *fundamentum*, or foundation, of our lives and hopes. We also pay attention to statements about the testimony, baptism and communion, and have fundamental or basic things to say, for example, about the "Holy Trinity," a word that does not appear in the story.

No one at random could match the details of the saving story of Christian faith. Give trillions of monkeys trillions of years and they would not randomly

ype even the words "Holy Bible," to say nothing of the 66-book "library of testimonies" that follow it. Everyone who receives bread and wine as the body and blood of a Risen Savior has heard the story, has had the fundamental testimony reach them, often through people who risked everything on it bearing their truth—The Truth.

The fundamentals of the faith point less to *what* one knows and more to *Whom* one knows. Paying attention to fundamentals is a dynamic act: we hear and behave differently depending upon whether we are women or men, young or old, healthy or ill, rich or poor, White or Black, strong in faith or doubting and despairing, on a roll or in the pits. Knowing, believing and having the fundamentals does not mean that we settle down into stale, static or rigid postures.

Now along comes "fundamentalism"—the word some Christians choose for themselves and others use to define them. Fundamentalists claim that their choice of basics in the story, best preserved in dogma or prescription, is absolutely the right and only one—and they have the absolute

"The fanatic believes that he is doing exactly what the Lord would do if the Lord were also in possession of the facts."

and only right "hold" on the fundamentals they have chosen. (By the way, Protestant fundamentalists do not include baptism, the eucharist, or the Trinity among their "fundamentals." First, they themselves do not agree about these matters and, second, they do not consider them useful weapons in

the wars fundamentalists choose to fight.)

Before nonfundamentalists throw bricks at their Christian neighbors, it might be good to send a few congratulatory cards. Fundamentalists have good antennae: they have distant early-warning signal devices that pick up assaults on faith and life. Their focus on the family may turn out to be biased, and they might fight for it with unattractive means toward unacceptable ends, but they know that something is changing to which they must respond. Their "concerned women" may try to impose some culturally conditioned patterns on nonfundamentalists and call these patterns "Christian absolutes," but they are concerned enough to be concerned—while many other Christians are apathetic. Fundamen-

talists at least know that there are fundamentals worth living by and dying for, and they have alerted others to the need to rethink their commitments.

Enough. For the rest, there are reasons to draw a line between receiving the gift of faith in “the fundamentals” and “fundamental-

ism.” The “-ism” ending ought to alert us that trouble is ahead. Thus “Americanism” is a view usually claimed by people who are sure they alone know what it is to be American; “Lutheranism,” a word I join millions of fellow-believers in using, can be more rigid and encrusted than the phrase “the Lutheran church,” or “the Gospel as a man named Luther grasped it.” The “-ism” often suggests ideology, self-assurance, arrogance and, in matters of faith, allows for no winsomeness or humility.

When the “-ism” gets attached to what Christians regard as “fundamental,” it often breeds fanaticism. As one smart crack has it, “The fanatic believes that he is doing exactly what the Lord would do if the Lord were also in possession of the facts.” Fundamentalism prides itself on its “literalism,”

Protestant fundamentalists do not include baptism, the eucharist, or the Trinity among their “fundamentals.”

not noticing or le-
ting us point out
that what it chooses
to call “literal” is,
others, “figurative.”
For example, funda-
mentalism likes to
use the patent
symbolic dream-
and-vision language
of Ezekiel, Daniel,
and Revelation, to
write precise pre-
scriptions for God’s
future activity.

the millennium to come.

Fundamentalism tends to downplay the continuing drama of faith as we know it in Job, the Psalms, Habakkuk, and Paul. It does not allow for ambiguity, though the Bible—as it presents the fundamental story—knows and shows that there are more sides than one in issues of personal grasp of faith. Fundamentalists tend to be exclusivists and separatists: worship exactly my way, or I’ll turn my back and condemn you.

The opposite of fundamentalism—relativism, with its “everything is variable” posture—has its own problems and is a topic for another piece. (By the way, I define a relativist as someone who stands on one foot on a banana peel—and the other foot on the banana peel.)

But, indeed, God has acted, and not not-acted; God is complex.

present and not simply absent. You have a right to lay claim to God's action, and to experience God's presence. You have a right to point to the sure testimonies of Scripture, and to rely on them.

And you have the right to ask for more when your born-

again neighbor rules you out of the Kingdom because you have "different" fundamentals than she does; or when the church down the block advertises an exclusive hold on God's truth, and proclaims it in a narrow way. The Christian faith is expansive and embracing: it would have you reach out, knowing, as the old hymn had it, that "there's a wideness in God's mercy."

At the same time, our reaction to a prejudiced fundamentalist might inspire us to examine whether we ourselves come on as closed-minded about what are called "the mysteries of faith." There's something of the fundamentalist in everyone of us; maybe the doctrinaire neighbor is doing us a favor by holding up a mirror in which we see something of ourselves.

The drama of faith, St. Paul-style, blends sureness and doubt,

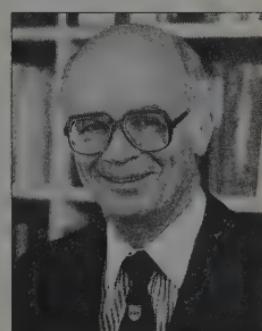
The fundamentals of the faith point less to *what* one knows and more to *Whom* one knows.

living firm on foundations and being tossed about, saying "yes" and "no" to marriage, mourning, rejoicing, and having possessions (1 Corinthians 7:27-31). Yet behind this drama is God's sure Word in Jesus that is always "yes" for us. Listen to St. Paul's first and last

word, his rock-bottom affirmation: "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, . . . was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes.' For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'" (2 Corinthians 1:19-20).

That's fundamental. **G**

Martin E. Marty, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America pastor, is Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, senior editor of The Christian Century and senior scholar-in-residence at the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith and Ethics.



Who Needs Creeds?

Nancy Koester

What is a creed? Very simply, a creed is a statement of faith. It may be spoken aloud, or written down. It may be very brief: "*I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord,*" or it may be lengthy. Creeds are personal, but not private. Spoken within a worshiping community, creeds put into words a consensus or agreement among Christians about what is central to the Christian faith.

An ecumenical confession of faith like the Nicene Creed binds people together with Christians all over the world. It also binds Christians of past, present and future generations together. To make a confession of faith in a worship setting is to declare publicly that our lives are bound up with Jesus Christ, and that we belong to the community of faith that spans time and distance.

Christians usually apply the word *creed* to the three statements of faith widely accepted throughout the Christian church, namely the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds. These three creeds have special status as "ecumenical creeds" because of their approval by ancient church councils and their wide acceptance by

Christians throughout the world. Of the three, the Nicene Creed has a special place because it is used by Eastern Orthodox Christians, as well as by Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Throughout the history of the Christian church, creeds have helped Christians proclaim Christ in an ever-changing world.

The word "creed" also has broader meaning. According to theologian Brian Gerrish, whose thought on creeds helped shape this article, a creed may be "any official codification of . . . the beliefs of a religious community" (From "Christian Creeds" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, editor). The earliest creeds or statements of faith are found in the Bible. For example, the words of Deuteronomy 26 recall how God's people, in bondage in Egypt, cried out to God, ". . . and the Lor-

“heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm . . . and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deuteronomy 26:7-9, Revised Standard Version). God’s people were instructed to say these words as they brought their offerings to the priest in the temple.

In the New Testament, Paul declares that the message about Jesus was entrusted to him so that he could pass it on to others: “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*” (1 Corinthians 15:3-5, RSV). Paul’s phrase “in accordance with the scriptures” is important since creeds attempt to convey, in short form, the message of the scriptures in ways that meet the needs of the community.

Creeds and needs

Because our identity as a people of faith centers on Jesus, Christians need to know and speak clearly about who Jesus is. When Christians come together for worship, especially when people enter the Christian community through Baptism, creeds bind us together in one family of faith.

The Apostles’ Creed probably comes from an ancient baptismal confession, dating back perhaps as

far as the year 200. The person or persons to be baptized would be taught the basics of the faith. When the time came for Baptism, these questions would be asked:

Creed and catechism together teach us who we are as the people of God.

“Do you believe in God the Father, Almighty? And in Christ Jesus, his only Son, our Lord? And in the Holy Spirit, the church, and the resurrection of the body?” The response to these questions was like a password that brought new Christians into the Christian community.

We need creeds to teach us the essence of the faith. The Apostles’ Creed is ancient, but today’s Lutherans find that Luther’s Small Catechism provides clear, easy-to-learn explanations for each part of the creed. No other teaching tool can equal the catechism’s simplicity, grace and power. Creed and catechism together teach us who we are as the people of God.

We also need creeds to help defend the faith from false teaching. The Nicene Creed is a good example of a creed that affirms faith in Christ and that at the same time refutes error. At the center of our faith is belief in the person of Jesus Christ, whom Christians hold to be both human and divine. But in the fourth cen-

tury a false teaching called Arianism asserted that the Son of God was a creature, not equal with God. To combat the Arian heresy, Christians affirmed Jesus' full divinity, or oneness with God: Jesus "was in the beginning with God, and without him was not anything made that was made" (a quote from the Barmen Declaration—see "Modern needs"). Many of the phrases in the Nicene Creed which now seem unusual ("true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father") played a vital role in preserving the faith.

We need creeds to teach us the essence of the faith.

The Reformation gives a third reason why we need creeds: **Creeds can help recover something that has been lost.** The heart of the Reformation is the rediscovery of the gospel as the church's true treasure. That rediscovery is formally made available to the church in catechisms, creeds and confessions. The best-known statement of faith to come from the Reformation era is the Augsburg Confession of 1530, written by Philipp Melanchthon, a close associate of Martin Luther. The Augsburg Confession addresses issues of faith and life in the firm conviction that in Christ we have a gracious God. As Article IV on Justification in the Book of Concord says, "We receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we be-

lieve that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sins are forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us."

Modern needs

In modern times, creeds and confessions have continued to meet the needs of Christians. For example, when the Nazis tried to control Christians and manipulate the churches to serve Hitler's ends, an ecumenical group called the "Confessing Church" responded with the Barmen Declaration of 1934. The Barmen Declaration both confesses faith in Christ and rejects the false teachings that threaten the church: "we repudiate the false teaching that the church can turn over the form of her message . . . according to some dominant ideological and political convictions," such as Nazism. The Barmen Declaration helped Christians witness to the Lordship of Christ and resist the power of evil. Throughout the history of the Christian church, **creeds have helped Christians proclaim Christ in an ever-changing world.** GC

The Rev. Nancy Koester recently completed her doctorate in church history from Luther Seminary, St. Paul. She and her husband, Craig, are co-authors of the 1994 Bible study on Hebrews, "The Unshakable Kingdom."



Flowers for the Bishop

Katherine Richey Johnson

Just as Sandy pushed open the door and entered the sanctuary, she heard the pastor say to the children assembled for the opening of Sunday school, "Today the bishop is going to be here for church. Does anyone know what a bishop is?"

A rainbow of upraised hands formed. "Isn't he like a king?" one child asked.

Sandy smiled. It was unlikely that any of the children in this inner-city congregation had ever seen a bishop. Suddenly her mind followed her eyes to the empty altar.

"Oh no!" she exclaimed to herself. "No flowers. The bishop is coming today, and there are no flowers on the altar!"

For a moment dismay immobilized her. The bishop may not be coming, but he is a welcome guest. Sandy wanted him to have a favorable impression of their church.

Then Sandy remembered the rose bush on the lot behind the church. Armed with a knife from the kitchen, she hurried out the door, down the steps, and across the back alley. There it was, pink blossoms blending with the weeds that guarded it.

The roses looked surprisingly healthy, Sandy noted, untended as they were. Her mind went to some of the children at Sunday school. "Just like the roses, we have many children untended,



here on their own, some neglected," she thought.

Sandy reached through the growth and grasped a rose branch. "Ouch!" she yelped, as a thorn pierced her thumb. A quick chop with the knife separated the branch from the bush.

She quickly gathered several more blossom-laden stems. Then she went to a nearby lilac bush and cut leaves to go with the flowers.

As the youth choir moved into place, several of the faces lit up when they glanced at the altar and saw the flowers. The bishop, however, hardly seemed to notice them. He was looking at the children. His expression was tender as he watched the youth choir sing. Hope shone in the faces of the choir as praises filled the sanctuary and wafted into the neighborhood through the open door.

Then it struck Sandy: the real flowers for the bishop were not on the altar. They were in the choir loft, singing. And what a beautiful bouquet they made, as they are nurtured and tended and fed. ©

Katherine Richey Johnson is a nurse and certified diabetes educator. She and her husband, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America chaplain, attend Peace Lutheran Church, in Tacoma, Washington.

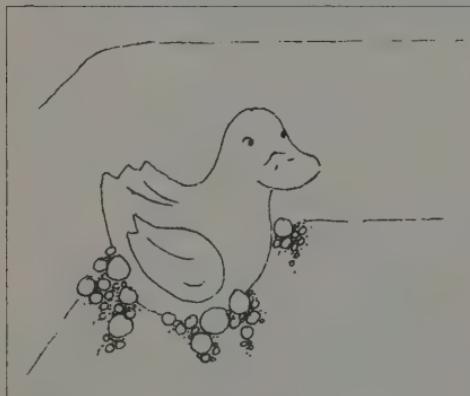
Bathtub theology, mealtime patrol

Teaching our children the basics

Liv Rosin

"Mom, did you know God loves everybody even the bad guys?"

I've come to expect questions like this from my five-year-old son, Seth. His reflections on God have been tumbling out



of his mouth since he began Sunday school at the age of two. Seth has informed my husband Mark and me that God is both stronger and older than anyone (superheroes included) and that God has a mother whose name is Louise. His three-year-old sister, Aeli, nods her head as if these statements are common knowledge.

The remarks made by Seth and Aeli are similar to the many que-

tions asked by children throughout the centuries. Perhaps what makes our conversations somewhat unique is that they don't take place at family devotions, on the way home from Sunday school, or before bedtime prayers. More often than not, our theological discussions take place while Seth and Aeli are in the bathtub.

Handing down the legacy of faith to our children becomes one of the most challenging and rewarding responsibilities we face. It's up to the grown-up-in-faith to teach our children "the basics."

Knowing where to start

How do we teach our children the basics? Or in the words of *Luther's Small Catechism*, "What does this mean?" I asked three young mothers from my congregation—St. Peter's Lutheran Church—for insight. For Polly Henderson, Pam Berg, and Cindy Olson, the most important message to teach is simple: "Our children need to know that God and Jesus love us," says Cindy. "God created the world, all that we have

comes from God. Jesus died for us, and we all have a place with him in heaven."

Polly agrees. "This message of Jesus' love needs to be a part of everyday life. Children need to understand that their faith in this love gets them through anything and everything. Jesus' love most certainly won't put them on easy street, but it will get them through the difficult times."

Each of the women also stressed the importance of Christian community. "Jim and I want our three girls to know that church is a place where they can go to be part of a family," says Pam.

Teaching by example

A pastor's daughter, I was raised in a home focused on the church and its teachings. Mealtime prayers, evening devotions, and "Now I lay me down to sleep" came as naturally as breathing. My parents modelled what it meant to be an active Christian at church, in the home and in the community.

"As parents, we need to lead by example," says Polly. Children need to see us take the time to act on our faith. We need to volunteer, to reach out as Christ did."

"It's so important for people to find their niche in a congregation," says Pam. "It's great when parents bring their children to Sunday school, but they also need to become involved in some part of the church as well. It needs to become a way of life for the whole family."

Singing songs and reading Bible stories both in the home and at church are important tools, as are meal and bedtime prayers. Cindy and her husband, Rolf, find that beginning a meal with prayer helps set the stage for quality family time.

"Prayer helps us focus on the good things that have happened during the day," she says. And if she, Rolf, or six-year-old Erin forget to pray, two-year-old Ian reminds them. "Ian is always on mealtime patrol," comments Cindy. "He says 'pray God' and folds his hands, always ending the prayer with a firm Amen."

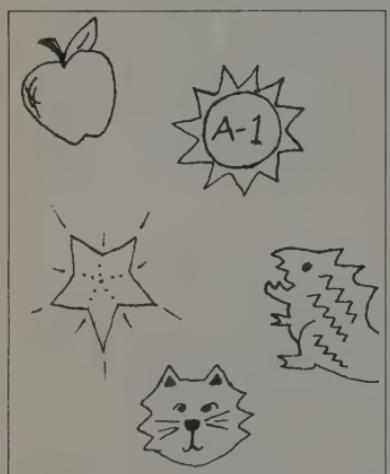
Polly concurs that prayer is a very important tool for children to learn. She also stresses the importance of teaching them to view the world through a Christian perspective.

"As often as possible, Lee and I dialogue with our girls about making good choices. We also try to relate everyday events to something Christ did."



Passing down the traditions

Holiday and family traditions are other ways to pass the legacy of faith to our children. The seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany are filled with "teachable moments."



All three of the women mentioned nightly devotions during Advent. "This past Advent was the first time we attempted to have nightly family devotions," says Pam. "It really helped to have stickers for Danielle and Katelyn to place on a calendar. The stickers helped the girls understand what we were reading about."

Polly's family celebrates other traditions during the holiday season as well. "Our oldest daughter, Katie, dresses up as Santa Lucia, which gives us an opportunity to talk about saints," says Polly. "We also make a birthday cake for Jesus and sing 'Happy Birthday' on Christmas Eve."

Cindy comments that Ian really enjoyed "Mismis" this last year and couldn't understand why the joy and stories of Jesus' birth had to go away in January.

"While Ian and I were visiting an ill friend, Ian noticed that the friend's Christmas decorations had not yet been taken down, even though it was well into January. Ian was so excited to see the decorations and shouted 'Baby Jesus! Mismis tree!' My friend responded, 'I'm with you, Ian. The decorations should be around for a long time.'"

Traditions need not end in January, however. Little things like baking a cake for each baptismal anniversary, playing tapes of Sunday school songs on the way to the store, and taking a weekly "creation walk" to explore God's world are always of teaching the basics of Christianity.

Sometimes Mark and I wonder whether Seth will remember his discussions as the bathtub theologian. Perhaps the dim memories will be merely a source of embarrassment. But if he can live his life remembering that "God loves everyone—even the bad guys," our efforts will not have gone down the drain. **CG**

An English teacher, Liv Rosin, Minneapolis, Minnesota, is looking forward to celebrating God's creation all summer long with her bathtub theologians, Seth and Aeli.



Baptism—a Basic and a Unifier

Michele M. Belisle

Ashley's birth immediately brought more joy to our lives than we could have imagined. It also brought a whole new dimension of responsibility that required us to make decisions—big and small—every day. My husband, John, and I had many decisions to make early on in Ashley's life: How to feed her? How to diaper her? How to care for her during the work week?

One of our most important decisions was, "Where should Ashley be baptized?" Should she be baptized in the Roman Catholic church where John was raised, or in the Lutheran church, where I was raised?

While John and I had worshiped together regularly prior to Ashley's birth (in churches of many different denominations), we had not yet decided where we should make our church home and raise our own children. Somehow our search continually brought us back to St. Timothy Lutheran Church in St. Paul where, after much thought, discussion and prayer, we decided to become members and have Ashley baptized.

Even though I was happy with our decision, some questions remained. Was this really the right



Ashley on her baptism day, with mom, Michele Belisle.

choice for us as a family?

When Ashley was three weeks old, Pastor Paul Larsen from St. Timothy came to talk with us about our request for Ashley's baptism. We described our backgrounds and explained to him how we had arrived at our

decision. We also shared our lingering uncertainty.

Pastor Larsen reminded us of one of the basics of the Christian faith that we confess during the Nicene Creed—"We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins." He explained that through Baptism, the Holy Spirit is sent to unite us with Christ, and with all Christians throughout the world.

What a relief to be reminded of the power of baptism! God's gift to us in Baptism transcends denominational lines. Ashley's baptism is valid and recognized regardless of whether it was performed in the Catholic church or the Lutheran church. Those few last doubts dissolved in the realization that in Baptism there is unity.

At eight weeks, Ashley was baptized at St. Timothy Lutheran Church. She was welcomed into the Lord's family and received as fellow member of the "Body of Christ." CG

Daily Basics

Marilyn Abrahamson

From early childhood I had been told that beauty is only skin deep. But I wonder, for in my work as a beauty consultant for a beauty company, I see the difference in women as they become aware of their own beauty.

Women always have shared beauty tips. They offer guidance on makeup and on how to look one's best. More importantly, they offer guidance on discerning the inner beauty of spirituality.

Sisters-in-faith often share with each other the qualities of faith, and how to apply these qualities to the deep yearning of our lives. In faith we absorb into our very cells the love of God. We believe in a nurturing, protecting and providing God in a creating God who calls us creatures "good."

There is more similarity than one might think between the beauty regimen I recommend as a beauty consultant and the faith regimen I try to model as mother, grandmother and sister-in-faith. Let's consider

the basics: the basics of beauty and the basics of faith.

Daily Basics

Cleanse • Cleansers remove surface debris, makeup and oils and cleanse the skin gently and thoroughly.

In faith we cleanse by confessing and seeking forgiveness. At one time or another most of us have experienced the cleansing tears of grief or confessed sin. Mercy and grace combine to allow "gentle and thorough" cleansing of the soul.

Mask/Exfoliate • This basic exercise improves the skin's texture by removing impurities and dead skin cells.

So in our faith lives, inner healing needs patient and careful peeling away of layer after layer of perhaps painful memories, years of denial and avoidance, and a removing of the masks worn to hide the dark nights of the soul.

"Exfoliating" also can mean shedding grudges, envy, jealousy and bitterness that keep us from loving ourselves and others.

Freshen • Freshening completes the cleansing process and restores the skin's pH so there exists a natural resistance to bacteria.



To finish cleansing and removing the masks in our faith lives, we need to focus on the good. *“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”* (Philippians 4:8).

Pray for the wisdom and strength to face problems, seek solutions and begin healing. Meditation helps us focus on God who brings refreshment to the soul and unlocks inner beauty. Meditate on the names of Jesus as Saviour, Lord, Good Shepherd, Emmanuel, Friend, and others you know.

Moisturize • Moisturizing the skin gives it a smooth texture. This helps keep the skin elastic.

How does the Christian “condition”? Daily prayer . . . Scripture study . . . weekly worship . . . sharing the Lord’s Supper . . . listening or singing favorite spiritual songs and hymns . . . praising and thanking God . . . gaining encouragement from a community of faith . . . serving others . . . telling the story . . .

Foundation • Foundation protects the skin from elements in the environment and covers minor imperfections. Foundation lays the groundwork for the eye, lip and cheek makeup.

Claim this truth as your foundation: I am a child of God; I am baptized into the holy Christian faith. Jesus died for me; I am a person precious to God, created, loved and made new; I am born of the Spirit of God; I am called into the holy Christian church, which makes me royalty, chosen of God, destined from the foundation of the earth; I am born again and again, as Martin Luther would say.

With a good foundation in faith, mature Christians can move from “the basics” to “beyond the basics.”

The daily basics of beauty apply externally and internally. Some beauty is only skin deep; real beauty comes from the soul. G

Marilyn Abrahamson is a beauty consultant, choir director and an inspirational writer/speaker. She and her husband, Luther, live in Peoria, Arizona. He is a chaplain of Good Samaritan Hospital in Phoenix. They are parents to three daughters: Liv, Kara, and Siri; and grandparents to three.



Session 6: The Anchor of the Soul



Craig and Nancy Koester
Study Text: Hebrews 6:1-20

Memory verse

"And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end . . ." (Hebrews 6:11*).

Overview

The author of Hebrews builds upon the theme of Christian maturity begun in Chapter 5. With lives based on gospel foundations, Christians are to encourage one another in good works and guard against apostasy or rejecting God. Even when they suffer, Christians can grow in faith. Jesus Christ is the steadfast anchor of the soul, holding us securely to God's love through the storms of life and death.

Opening

How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!

What more can he say than to you he has said

Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled? ("How Firm a Foundation," *Lutheran Book of Worship* 507).

Gracious God, you have given us a firm foundation in your holy Word. Build now upon that foundation, so that we may grow in faith and understanding. Build now upon that foundation, making us bold to serve you in this world. Amen.

(*All Scripture references during the 1994 study are from the Revised Standard Version.)

Building on the foundations

When people go to school, they start with the basics so that they can go on to more complex subjects. They progress from simple addition to algebra and from ABCs to literature.

In the same way, when workers build a house, they first lay the foundation. Then they go on to build the rest of the house securely on that foundation. It would make no sense if workers kept on building the foundation and never added a first or second story.

Read Hebrews 6:1-13. The author of Hebrews says that it is not good for Christians to keep laying the foundation and never build upon it. He wants them to leave behind the elementary teachings of Christianity (see verse 1), not in the sense of abandoning those teachings, but of completing them.

i. According to verses 1-2 the author assumes that his readers have a basic understanding of the faith. In the space provided, list several things that the author thinks the people already know.

Put a check mark by any items that seem unfamiliar to you.

The teachings listed in verses 1-2 are not unique to Christianity. Jewish people also held to these beliefs in various forms. The author of Hebrews was writing to Christians of Jewish background who would easily have accepted parts of Jesus' teachings that were familiar to

them, without realizing how unique Jesus really was. The author wants to bring his readers to a fuller understanding of Jesus, an understanding that builds on, but also surpasses, their former faith.

2. The author wants his readers to go on to “maturity” (RSV) or “perfection” (NRSV). Read Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8-9. According to these verses, what other experiences contribute to perfection or maturity? Are there other things not mentioned in these verses that, in your experience, characterize or contribute to Christian maturity?

Read 6:4-6. The issue in these verses is apostasy, or willfully rejecting God’s love. The author of the letter to the Hebrews may have been writing to Christians who had separated themselves from the fellowship of other Christians. They may even have considered returning to Judaism. For these and other reasons, the author uses the strongest language possible to make them aware of their situation.

3. According to verses 4-5, how is an apostate (one who rejects Christ) like other Christians? According to verse 6, how is an apostate different from other Christians?

The author of Hebrews knew that Christians would sin. He clearly believed that their sins could be forgiven (4:16). Apostasy is different from other sins because it means complete rejection of the grace God offers. According to the author of Hebrews, Christians who reject God’s grace will not be saved (see 6:4, 8).

The author of Hebrews also understood that as long as people remained in a faith relationship with God, there was a basis for forgiveness. But if they rejected this relationship with God altogether, God would no longer be their source of forgiveness.

- By using both promise and warning, the author motivates his readers to remain faithful. Read Hebrews verses 7-8. What promise is made? What warning is given?

Other biblical writers also used vivid and uncompromising words to inspire Christians to remain faithful. Notice, for example, the similarities between the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:16-20 and those in Hebrews 6:7-8. Both warnings are severe, but they are intended to keep people in the faith—not to make them give up hope in the race of God.

The book of Hebrews gives the impression that those who leave the faith cannot enter it again. Yet other New Testament passages show that God wants even those who have strayed away to return to the flock (see Matthew 8:12-13).

We feel sure of better things

Like bright sunshine after a cloudburst, the tone of Hebrews 6 changes dramatically in verse 9. The readers are called "beloved" and assured that God has a great destiny in store for them. The author knows that hope and affirmation promote learning; anyone who wants to be a good teacher must encourage rather than discourage the students.

The author mentions "the love which you showed for God's] sake in serving the saints" (verse 10). Here the people are not told what they have failed to do, or what they ought to do at some time in the future. They are praised for what they have already done.

If people are made to feel guilty about all the things they are not doing, and never hear a word of appreciation for what they are doing, they will have little desire to grow in good works. It is important for Christians to express their gratitude to one another and to God for the good that is already being done. The purpose of such affection is not mere self-congratulation, but caring appreciation. This is like watering a healthy plant so that it can continue to grow and bloom.

5. Read verses 9-12. Sometimes the term *saint* is reserved for a person of exceptional faith. But in the New Testament the word *saints* refers to all who believe. What specific opportunities has God given you for serving the saints? What are three important ways in which your congregation serves others?

As Christians, we need to take time to thank God for the good works that are already being done in our congregations or communities. As God gives us opportunity, we are to tell those who are doing good works that we support and appreciate them. We also need to remember to pray for them.

6. According to the author of Hebrews, God will not overlook the work we have done or the love we have shown for God's sake. What is the place of good works in the Christian life?

A sure and steadfast anchor

Public officials, elected or appointed to an office, are sometimes "sworn in" before they begin their term of service. Such an oath rests on an authority higher than the individual officeholder. For example, the president of the United States is under the authority of the Constitution and swears to uphold it.

There is, however, no authority higher than God. That does not mean that God acts arbitrarily, as people sometimes do when they are not accountable to a higher authority. God's integrity is unshakable.

7. The "two unchangeable things" (verse 18) are God's *oath* and God's *promise*. Read verses 13-20, noting where the words *oath* and *promise* occur. To whom are the *oath* and *promise* given?

God promised Abraham and Sarah a child, through whom they would become a great nation. As heirs of God's promises to Abraham and Sarah, our faith is deepened by studying their experience.

- 3. **Read Genesis 22:1-10.** How did Abraham's experience in these verses call God's promise into question? **Read Genesis 22:11-18.** God's oath is given in verse 16, and God's promise is repeated in verses 17-18. Why do you think Abraham now needed God's oath in addition to God's original promise? See the Bible study resource book for further information.

Read Hebrews 6:17. According to this verse, God's promise is unchangeable. The oath assures us that God will keep his promises, no matter what obstacle seems to come along. For example, the crucifixion of Jesus at first seemed to destroy God's promise, but God kept the promise through resurrection. The resurrection is God's oath that Jesus' promise—to be God with us—will always be kept.

- 4. In your life or community, what experiences may seem to call into question God's promise to bless you? What reassurance does God offer that his promises are dependable?

In verses 18-20, two word pictures are used to talk about hope. The first picture is an anchor. Faith is like an anchor because it reaches far beneath life's turbulent storms, holding us securely to God's unchangeable love.

Deep beneath the waves, the anchor cannot be seen—but it holds the ship securely. So, too, our faith in the unseen God steadies us through all the storms of life. The winds and waves can be violent, but they pass away. The anchor holds to what is permanent and strong—God's love.

The second picture is that of Jesus our high priest and ancient Jewish worship practices. The sanctuary of the

Temple had two parts, separated by a curtain or veil. The high priest passed through the curtain into the inner court to seek God's forgiveness on behalf of the people. Christians have hope because Jesus our high priest pleads for forgiveness on our behalf.

Verses 13-20 weave together several Old Testament themes. Despite their complexity, these verses have inspired one of Christianity's best-loved hymns, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less."

10. Turn to the hymn as it is printed on pages 92-93 of the Bible study resource book, or see LBW 293 or 294. Read the verses of the hymn carefully. What themes do you recognize from our study of Hebrews? On what occasions do you think this hymn could be sung? What gives this hymn its power?

Closing

Sing the hymn "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" (LBW 293 or 294) together. **G**

Looking Ahead

The next session will cover Hebrews 7:1—8:13. We will encounter the mysterious Old Testament figure of Melchizedek and at the same time gain a deeper understanding of what Jesus has done for us. The memory verse for next time is Hebrews 7:25: "Consequently [Jesus] is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Craig and Nancy Koester, St. Paul, Minnesota, are Evangelical Lutheran Church in America pastors. They are both connected with Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, where Craig teaches New Testament and where Nancy recently completed her doctorate in church history.

Nellie's Cookies

Marj Leegard

Nellie made white sugar cookies. Not dinky little dry circles but big, tender cookies sparkling with sugar and lightly browned at the edges. When her cookies were admired she said, "These are just sour-cream rolled cookies. Nothing special."

But they were special. We who were young and full of new ideas planned desserts for church events that were taken from the latest magazine. We'd plan great monstrosities of cream cheese and blue-berries, marshmallows and crumb crusts. Nellie would write the recipes down and then say, "I think I will make a few cookies." Generous soul that she was, she would bring both the featured dessert and a big blue-peckled roaster filled with cookies. Corners of white linen napkins poked out as a border under the roaster cover. We watched from behind the counter as our husbands chose their lunches. With school-boy smiles they reached for Nellie's cookies, then saw our disappointment and took dessert, carefully balancing a cookie on top.

Nellie made every cup of coffee we ever drank in that church. It was not a matter of putting the plug in the automatic coffee maker. She filled the huge



graniteware pots from the cream cans of water brought from home. She lifted them to the stove and while she waited for the water to boil she mixed her secret formula of egg, coffee and cold water, then carefully stirred this into the pot of boiling water. The critical move—never mastered by amateurs—was the progression from hot to boiling to not boiling over. After a few minutes of settling the grounds, the coffee was strained into another pot and pronounced ready to serve. This amber and gold brew, shining with faint dots of luminescence, has not been seen

since the demise of egg coffee from those old coffee pots.

Nellie's sister, Christine, was the "talented and gifted one," it was said. She was the church organist for over 50 years. When the fiftieth year arrived, we had a celebration. There were photographers from 250 miles away. The church was filled with guests who came back to the old home church to help mark this anniversary. There were flowers and cards, speeches, music and a sermon that reminded us how good it is to serve in the church. Christine had never received a salary, only little "puddles of money" left on the corner of the organ at Christmas and Pentecost. When we retired the old pump organ Christine retired, too. We put a bronze marker on the new organ to honor her.

When we thought about Christine, we remembered her in her black suit and pink satin blouse with her black hat perched exactly straight on her white hair. Nellie, we remembered in her starched apron and her welcoming smile that said, "Come to the banquet."

When Nellie was very old and not quite coherent she mourned her lack of sainthood—her "useless life." She had kept the big house clean and neat for her brothers and her parents and for Christine. She had spent hours every week with the mop and the dust cloth keeping the church immaculate between "Aid" cleanings and the janitor's quick tidying.

We did not put a brass marker on her coffee pot, or claim her blue roaster as a church artifact. Perhaps we should have.

Somehow we failed to sense that Nellie, too, had a ministry. How could we have forgotten that when we visited a home filled with sickness or great joy or sorrow and Nellie's cookies were there? When our babies were small Nellie never asked, "Girl or boy?" She knew. And she knew their names. "There is little Jimmy," she would say "and he is such a good boy."

I asked her once how she could remember all these names and she looked at me with wonder. "How can you pray for them if you do not learn their names at Baptism?"

We did not put a brass marker on her coffee pot, or claim her blue roaster as a church artifact. Perhaps we should have. It is too late to thank her in person, or to speak to her of her special kind of ministry, since she is no longer around to hear. But there is still time to remind ourselves and others that recognition of all our faithful ministers is in itself a ministry. Today would be a good time to start. C

*Columnist
Marj Leegard
is a semi-
retired beef
farmer from
Detroit Lakes,
Minnesota,
and an active
Lutheran.*



Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

► ELCA congregation welcomes children, families

Members of St. Luke Lutheran church in Cottage Grove, Minnesota welcome children and families by 1) being considerate of the needs of single parents with children; 2) helping children participate by teaching them about the symbols and other elements of worship; 3) planning opportunities for sharing intergenerational stories; and 4) by helping children cope with life transitions and traumas. The Rev. Joel Bexell, pastor at St. Luke, says it's important to include sermon illustrations from children's lives, and to remember their concerns in the prayers of the church.

May we be mindful of the value you place on children, O Jesus.

► Ecumenical covenant to be living document

The Upper Susquehanna and Lower Susquehanna synods are part of a grass-roots covenant signed by Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran bishops that is meant to be lived. The document, to be reviewed annually, calls for members to pray for each other, sponsor seasonal prayer services, promote pulpit exchanges in non-ucharistic liturgies, sponsor shared retreats and study the traditions of the three churches.

Open our eyes, Risen Savior, to possibilities for cooperation with other Christians.

◆ Women's ordination still a 'sticking point'

For some church bodies, the ordination of women remains controversial; some denominations still are debating the issue. Others ordain women but find lack of acceptance exists. Some priests of the Church of England are defecting to the Catholic Church because the first women's ordinations began in March. Bishops in Sweden's state Lutheran church ruled last year that men who openly oppose women's ordination cannot themselves be ordained (women's ordination has been allowed there since 1958).

O God of All, help us to work in partnership, using all our gifts.

◆ Lutherans in Cuba attempt reunification

Cuba is enjoying a religious revival. But Lutherans, small in number, have been divided into three different groups. Attempts are being made to dialogue and unite the disparate groups that together number some 300 members.

Bless the ministry of Lutherans in Cuba, Eternal God.

What issues and people in today's news can you add to your daily prayer list? G

Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news editor of The Lutheran.

What does it mean to be a Lutheran?

Those Who Know Their Need of God

Michael L. Cobbler

I always look forward to All Saints' Day in the church year because I know if I have anything to do with it, we will sing Canticle 17 in *Lutheran Book of Worship*. That canticle is a paraphrase of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) titled "How Blest Are Those Who Know Their Need of God." The title—which is also the refrain of the canticle—is useful shorthand for what it means to be a Lutheran: **Lutherans indeed know of their need of God.**

Martin Luther said that the thing or person in which you put your highest trust is your god. Therefore, all human beings have gods, even if they themselves do not acknowledge it. Lutherans believe in God, the God who brings light from darkness, speech from silence, who created the heavens and the earth, who sent the Son to save us. Lutherans know that our relationship with God is key. In short, we need God!



For a lot of us Lutherans, our birth is quickly followed by our "second birth"—Baptism. And even though a baptized baby does not understand his or her relationship with God, it is important that the relationship exists. After baptism, the community of faith will nurture the baptized in their relationship with the God they need.

Recognizing our need for God also drives us to a community of believers. True, we Lutherans have the same struggles as other church bodies about such matters as church attendance and involvement, but we know that nothing can really replace church—even if we may not like everything about our own congregation. The congregation is the place where we hear about God's intention for us in life, the place where we discern what is really needed to live faithfully. For Lutherans, knowing one's need of God is shown in meet-

g that need through a worshiping community.

Secondly, **Lutherans are motivated by the generosity of God. We get excited about the grace of God!** What a blessing to believe in the God who gives us all that we have and are. Because we receive so much, we Lutherans are, on the whole, generous people! We give substantially to our congregations, church schools, colleges and seminaries. We have one of the largest social-service systems in the country, and we respond well to emergency and disaster relief.

The generosity of God affects our attitudes toward grace as well. My experience in learning to write thank-you notes in school is a good example. The note I handed in for an assignment ended with, "I'll send you a gift like what you gave me within 10 days." My teacher—Lutheran—sought me out after school and said, "Do you realize that people give gifts out of a wish to give, without expecting something in return, except that we acknowledge them and thank them?" I realized then that although people may not always live on that basis, God always does.

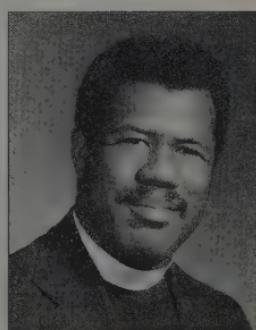
Also, **Lutherans are about affirming traditions without being captured by them.** Our place in the Christian experience was born out of the 16th century—which had its own difficulty with traditions—but we have always understood ourselves as a movement that comes from—and is part of—the one, holy,

catholic and apostolic church. Lutherans are watchful that traditions (the way we do things) do not turn into dogma (the substance of what we believe).

Finally, and fortunately, **Lutheran Christians are not easily typecast.** One of the great struggles in the witness of the church are the labels that typecast church bodies, and the assumptions behind those labels. It is to our advantage, I think, that Lutherans are not easily stereotyped.

Lutherans are diverse. We come from a host of backgrounds. We live around the world. We have a fair amount of argument of our own about who we are and where we fit: Are we evangelical Catholics? Are we trapped in the "old Reformation" while the "new reformation" passes us by? Are we "rundown liberal mainliners" or "mature quietists?" Questions, discussion, debate are healthy as long as we remember that our future as Lutherans must be tied to God's future. Then we will not be dismissed, but will engage others as a movement within the Body of Christ—led and fed by Jesus, ever knowing our need of God. **GC**

*The Rev.
Michael L.
Cobbler is
pastor at
First English
Lutheran
Church, Co-
lumbus, Ohio.*



Nurturing Adults in the Faith

Katherine Sandmaier

We never knew who was coming for dinner

As our four children grew up, we often found ourselves sharing dinner with a fifth young person. One of our children would develop an ac-



tendance to the point where an introduction to the family seemed appropriate. The family was usually eager to make the newcomer feel at home and part in the action. We were also interested in finding out about the visitor.

Those first conversations around the table tried to locate the common ground between us. Once there, "a friend of the family" often became "like one of the family."

We can apply this same thinking to adults as they join a Christian community. How does a newcomer to a congregation become "one of the family?"

An adult newcomer may be familiar with the congregational family, its customs, rites, and dogmas. There is also a chance that the language, symbols, even the costumes, will seem foreign and strange. How does the congregation help the newcomer become "one of the family" and so live out the Holy Spirit's invitation to a communal life of faith?

Perhaps some basic questions might help: Do parishes educate or *form, direct* and *facilitate*? What information or skills are needed to live a Christian life? Do those of us in the church tend to emphasize the "head" part of faith, over the "heart"?

Conversation and the sharing of stories are key for e family and the congregation. Embedded in our stories are the values and beliefs we want to share. The sharing of faith stories sheds light on what faith The speaker and hearer each find, in the stories, eir place in the long history of the church.

When the stories of the family have been shared, is time to "unpack" the history of the people. Small oups can help the members form bonds with Scrip- re and claim the salvation story for their own. sing the Sunday lessons as topics can link the dis- ssions to worship.

A process has been re-discovered that can help do l this. **Catechumenal process** (the preparation of ults for baptism) has much to offer congregations terested in sharing the basics of faith—and be- nd.

If you want to dig deeper—and aren't afraid of ploring a process with an ancient name—then ad the sidebar "The catechumenal process." As u read it, think how it might work in your own ngregation. ☺

Katherine Sandmaier, Carmel, Indiana, has been a Christian educator for 20 years. She is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's learning minis- es facilitator in Region 6 and the convener of tional conferences on catechumenal process.



The catechumenal process

The *catechumenal process*, or *catechumenate*, is the in- tentional preparation of an adult for baptism. (An adult preparing for baptism is called a *catechumen*.) The catechumenate model is a gift to our time from the ancient urch.

The goal of the catechumenal process is, simply, formation in e faith. Participation in the process can help to:

- fully integrate members into the parish,
- renew parish life, and
- revitalize education, evangelism, and worship.

The catechumenal process shepherds an unbaptized adult, no, led by the Spirit to a congregation, wishes to explore life the faith. Other tracks in the program are used for those shing to reaffirm faith, transferring from another congreg- tion or denomination, or for parents whose child is to be ptized.

The catechumenal process—a journey through the waters of baptism—is led by members of the congregation who are enabled to share their own stories, and who model the Christian lifestyle. Through the process, the person considering Baptism is led to discern her own faith and the gifts of the Spirit.

Along the way, liturgical rites mark the stages of the catechumenate, and give ownership and responsibility

The catechumenal process is a journey through the waters of baptism.

to the whole congregation. Conversion is a public, not private matter.

The catechumenate prepares a person for the most important action of a lifetime, and provides skills and

support for living the Christian life. It is not a substitute for infant baptism. Infant baptism speaks of entrance into Christian life, adult baptism speaks of conversion into Christian life. All baptisms are a gift of grace.

Parishes often are transformed by the catechumenal process. Led by laity—with a pastor as advisor and resource—the process taps members of the congregation to serve as catechists (teachers/mentors), small group leaders and sponsors. It nurtures the whole church community. Interest in adult education must be rooms in a congregation where small groups form bonds that allow—and encourage—questioning and testing.

As the congregation takes part in the rites of the catechumenate, and witnesses the baptisms or reaffirmations, it is as if a mirror is held before all. Each person states again the promises of God, and hears the promises of God's covenant. The sacraments and Word take on renewed life. All of life can be touched in this process—life with God, stewardship of creation, work of justice and mercy.

The catechumenate is not a gimmick or quick fix. It needs trained facilitators and the flexibility to be adapted to diverse situations and the differing needs of people. It can provide for those souls who visited at the family table and decided to stay.

**For more information on "Catechumenal Process," write to Division for Congregational Ministries, ELCI, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631.*

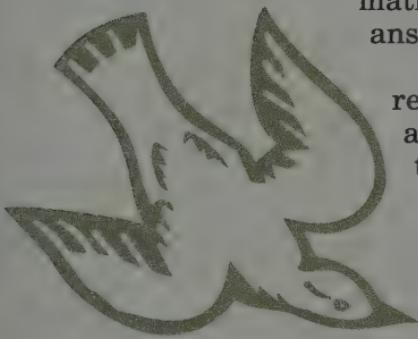
—Katherine Sandmaier

Confirmation: Preparation for a Life-long Faith

Leah K. Schafer

“Confirmation is a must!” Ask any Lutheran, and that’s what they’d say.

But probe deeper, and you’ll probably find that most people—pastors, lay instructors, students and parents alike—will admit they are not totally happy with their current program, that it could somehow “be better.” And, probing deeper, if you asked Lutherans, “What is confirmation?” you’d probably get as many answers as there are Lutherans!



One reason for this wide mix of reaction is that—unlike Baptism and the Eucharist—we are unable to turn to Scripture for a clear, direct command of Jesus to “do confirmation.” Other reasons are historical (see “Before Confirmation . . .” sidebar). But even though confirmation may be theologically and liturgically

“unnecessary” (unlike Baptism, confirmation is not a sacrament), confirmation is crucial to congregational ministry.

The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report defines *confirmation ministry* as “a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that helps the baptized through Word and sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.” In light of this definition, a congregation’s confirmation ministry should work in partnership with the ministries of Christian education, adult education and youth. Confirmation should draw baptized young people into the Christian community and prepare them to live in a highly complex world. Confirmation ministries also should prepare young people, and indeed the entire congregation, for lifelong participation in the Body of Christ. Such a minis-

try takes thought and commitment, as well as the support and devotion of parents and the whole congregation.

A confirmation ministry that leads to lifelong and lifestyle commitment to Christ takes time. And what a precious commodity time is these days! But just as exercising once a year does not do much for one's cardiovascular system, quick memorization of the Small Catechism, followed by a rite, does not prepare one for life in Christ and in the Christian community.

Yes, it is possible for congregations to package their confirmation ministries in a neat, tidy "easy-to-swallow pill"—and some may even think that sounds desirable. But such a prescription—it couldn't be called a ministry—would not seriously involve today's young people in Christ's mission. Nor would it help equip them for a lifetime of faith and learning. Confirmation, according to the task force report,



seeks to "empower young people to trust their own experiences of Christ's faithfulness as they identify those values and beliefs for which they are willing to suffer . . . (or) . . . help young people determine how they want to live now and in the future." To refocus confirmation on this lifelong journey of faith means building some new approaches. We must be willing to take the risk and let go of

To obtain a copy of the Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, call the ELCA Distribution Service at 1-800-328-4648 (Code LT69-2327). Price is \$1.00 per copy plus \$2.50 shipping and handling.

confirmation programs that consist only—or primarily—of classroom lectures, workbooks and memorization.

Confirmation is a Lutheran "basic." The challenge to all Lutherans is: Will confirmation be basically just a liturgical rite, something parents make children "go through"? Or can we develop a ministry with and for young people and their families that equips the baptized to be people of faith at all times and in all places for the rest of their lives? **GC**

The Rev. Leah K. Schafer serves as a pastor at St. Mark Lutheran Church, Springfield, Virginia. She is married and mother to two girls.

Before Confirmation, there was Baptism . . .

Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus instructed the disciples to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Matthew 28:19). The early church did that; and by the early part of the second century, new converts, after being baptized, were anointed with oil. At the completion of the baptismal rite, the newly baptized received his or her first Eucharist.

In the early centuries bishops performed baptisms. In time, as the church spread geographically, presbyters (parish pastors) would perform everything up through the water-bath action of baptism, but the post-baptismal anointing was reserved for the bishops. As accessibility to bishops became more difficult, the length of time between the baptism with water and the anointing with oil increased greatly.

Fueled by the developing belief of the Middle Ages that water baptism was the sole means of salvation, children were baptized as soon after birth as possible. The subse-

quent anointing with oil by the bishop was often neglected by parents—and the idea gained acceptance that such anointing and laying on of hands at confirmation conferred the gifts of the Spirit, especially *fortitude*—that "strength for the battle against the world, the flesh and the devil."

In November 1439, confirmation was officially designated a Sacrament in the Western church, although the practice had long been accepted.

Luther rejected confirmation, because he did not regard it as a sacrament, and because it was by then understood as the "completion" of Baptism. [Luther's baptismal liturgy of 1523 contained the anointing, his baptismal liturgy of 1526 did not.] In the end, Luther was willing to tolerate a "reformed variety of confirmation," after assuring himself that it would not take away from Baptism, or be understood as a sacrament.

For Luther, ever the educator, Christian instruction was crucial, and that instruction became one of the

early focal points of Lutheran confirmation.

In time, six distinct strands of Lutheran Confirmation developed—Catechetical, Hierarchical, Sacramental, Traditional, Pietistic, and Rationalistic—each with different understandings about the meaning of confirmation. As European Lutherans immigrated to North America, these six distinct “streams” have, over the last

300 years, merged together, muddying the waters.

In 1978, the liturgy for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (p. 124) restored the laying on of hands and the use of anointing/sealing with oil—done, not by a bishop, but by the parish pastor. What was once part of confirmation is now back to its earlier home, as a part of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. •

—LKS

How do congregations do it?

Is there one *right* confirmation program available for ELCA congregations? No. Each congregation must intentionally and prayerfully design a confirmation ministry that best fits that congregation in its particular time and place. Several resources are available to help congregations develop a confirmation ministry that works.

Many congregations (about 1500) use a mentoring program as part of their confirmation ministry. A mentoring guide titled *Shared Journeys* is available for \$3* from the ELCA Distribution Service (order LT69-8282).

Congregations often shape their programs around one of the six models or approaches described in *Six Models of Confirmation Ministry*: “longer and later,” “meeting of the young people,” “renewed school,” “relational catechists,” “project-centered programs,” or “catechumenal approaches.”) *Six Models* (\$3*) is available from the Distribution Service (order LT69-8352). Classroom, or session, strategies used by satisfied teachers (such as deepening ritual patterns, shaping conversation, developing projects, and creating shared experience) are collected in *Tools for Teaching Confirmation*, which is available through the Distribution Service for \$3* (order LT69-8719).

The Rev. Ken Smith

For the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries

*plus \$2.50 shipping and handling.

MISSION: ACTION

Sheer joy!

That's what I felt last September when I took part in the Fourth National Adult Literacy Congress in Washington, D.C. (see January '94 LWT Mission: Action column).

Congress delegates are adult learners who are learning to conduct meetings using notes they have written and notes they sometimes need help reading. They put ideas on flipcharts—asking for spelling help when needed—and said they wish to become part of the solution for the illiteracy problem in the United States.

The number one goal of congress delegates is leadership: "By September of 1995, adult learners in literacy programs, at all levels, will challenge and inspire at least 90 percent of adult learners to plan and participate in their [various literacy] organizations."

This energetic and hope-filled group has written national, state, and local action-plan steps and rated ways to evaluate each of those action plans. Under the leadership goal they plan to:

form learner planning teams, recognize and promote successful literacy projects, have leaders train other leaders, send learners to more conferences (devising how to

raise the money, provide transportation and child care),

- establish a speakers bureau,
- have different activities for different students to get everyone involved, and
- get students more involved, including describing how they got involved.

Beyond leadership, congress delegates wrote goals addressing these areas: Literacy and Jobs; Mandatory Literacy in Prisons, Employment and Welfare; Literacy and the Family; The Transition from Basic Skills; Quality Literacy Programs; Moving Us Forward; Public Awareness and Funding; Support Services to New Readers; Voting Rights and Citizenship Responsibilities; and English as a Second Language.

Let us pray that every adult literacy program in this country will be open to listening to the very people who know the most about being illiterate: the adult learners who are taking their newly acquired skills and accompanying responsibilities quite seriously.

*Faith L. Fretheim
Director for Literacy*

MISSION: COMMUNITY

Women of the ELCA

Interchange

The 21st century is just around the corner, and change is in the air.

To help us look at issues of change and be more prepared for what may lie ahead, Women of the ELCA's newsletter has some additional features and a new name: *Interchange*.

Why *Interchange*? Because two realities stand out for Women of the ELCA. One: this is a large organization. The churchwide organization includes more than 9,200 congregational units in 64 synodical women's organizations. We span a continent with an estimated 500,000 participants. We speak a host of languages and dialects. We live in cities, rural settings, suburbs and metroplexes. We range in age from one—yes! those babies at circle meetings count!—to over 100.

Making interconnections

It's a challenge amid this complexity to communicate with each other effectively. One of our greatest strengths in meeting that challenge is our network—women linked together in a common mission. When we get together, the spirit within each of us empowers all of us. **INTERCHANGE** facilitates interconnections within

Women of the ELCA.

So, you will see in various issues of *Interchange* ideas and resources that work for women, articles from our president, and information about programs and resources and how to use them.

Enter change

Change! That's the second reality. And it's inevitable. We must be prepared for some changes, and we must initiate others.

INTERCHANGE, then, raises issues that affect women. It talks about new or alternative ways of doing leadership development, communication and service. The piece may, frankly, make us uncomfortable at times because change has a way of doing that.

We invite you to view and use *Interchange* as a good friend—one who shares a lot with you, hears you, and walks into the future with you hand in hand.

To subscribe (three issues a year), send your check for \$3 made payable to *Women of the ELCA Interchange*, to Circulation, *Women of the ELCA Interchange*, Box 59303, Minneapolis, MN 55459-0303.

*Bonnie Belasic
Director for
Communications and
Stewardship Interpretation*

MISSION: GROWTH

Leadership and Heart

You've gotta
ave heart, all
ou really need
s heart"

Remember these words of an old favorite song? Christians think a lot about "heart" and loving one another. We talk about "heart" in the Empowered Leadership model presented at the leadership events in 1994 and 1995. We say that effective leadership has three dimensions: Head, Heart, Courage. We find Women of the ELCA have "lot of heart" in their leadership circles. Is it maybe too much? Basic to the model is that the three dimensions must be balanced—not exclusive of one another.

So, is the Heart dimension of leadership balanced? This is the dimension that uses interpersonal skills, coaching one another and giving positive reinforcement as we work together. It looks at the quality of our relationships.

We use the Heart dimension in leadership when we are open and sharing with our colleagues. It means spending time explaining why we do something and what we hope to do. When we take time to explain the reasons for a task, or listen to comments of another, we are practicing the Heart dimension. Have you, for instance, celebrated the success of another in your organization? Have you been



sensitive to those who may have special needs, like baby-sitting or car pooling? When you believe in and share the vision of the organization, you are practicing the Heart dimension.

In the leadership events we look at Mary of Bethany and her washing of Jesus' feet as an example of the Heart dimension. The icon of the lamp of oil is on our materials to remind us of this important part of leadership. Have you said aloud your personal mission to another? When was your last celebration for yourself . . . for someone else? Are you in a mentoring relationship? Do you listen more than talk in a conversation? Have you told someone lately about Christ's impact in your life?

We must remember, as we look at the second dimension of the Empowered Leadership model, that it is just that: the second dimension, one of three. In leadership terms, one can have "too much heart."

Next month we will explore the dimension of courage . . . get ready!

*Beckie Steele
Director for Leadership
Development*

Roles and Values

One of my hopes for this column is that it become part of an ongoing discussion between you and me about matters of interest and importance to us as Women of the ELCA. As part of that discussion, I ask that you think with me about the role and values—the basics—of Women of the ELCA and that you share your thoughts with me through letters or conversations at conventions, or in other ways.

Here are a few basic questions to start the discussion:

1. What do you think are the core values of this organization? What are the basic, essential values of Women of the ELCA? What are the principles or qualities we hold most dear for the organization?

I think I know some of the answers: faith in God; acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; obedience to Christ's call to serve our neighbors around the corner and around the world; commitment to treating people with justice and equity. What would you say are the special core values for the women's organization?

2. What is the significance of these core values for this organization? Where do these values lead us? Is it enough to work to spread the gospel, to feed the hungry and clothe the poor? There is still much to do in all of these areas, and yet should we be doing more? What about health care and other contemporary issues?

3. Whom do we exist to serve? **4.** What are those things that on the churchwide organization can do for Women of the ELCA? Provide Bible studies for the whole organization, so that women across the church take part in the

same study at the same time? Provide support and guidance to synodical women's organizations and new congregational units? Organize a triennial convention?

We know that synodical women's organizations and congregational units provide a great deal in terms of programs and spiritual enrichment. What are the needs that synodical organizations and congregational units cannot meet?

5. And what are the core programs and resources that the churchwide organization must continue to provide?

These are questions that are on my mind. I hope you will share your questions and ideas on your mind.

*Charlotte E. Fiechter
Executive Director
Women of the ELCA
8765 W. Higgins Road
Chicago, IL 60631-4189*

The Rain of the Holy Spirit

Mary E. F. Albing

at on our back steps keeping an eye on three-year-old Hannah who trilled a wagon filled with stuffed toys back and forth along the sidewalk, occasionally bending over a small wicket fence to look for ladybugs on tiny marigolds.

It had been a disappointingly hot and dry June. The seeds we planted weeks before in our vegetable garden had not yet shown the strength to push their first fleshy leaves above the hard crust of soil.

Tracks spread across the bare earth like jigsaw pieces, belying our efforts to water and encourage growth. Farmers digging the spring fields threw up gritty dirt into the wind that blew in great clouds across the prairie. The air was full of dust. It crept under the window sashes and onto our sills, irritated our eyes.

It was the third year of a severe drought on the great Northern plains. Lakes were shrinking, wells were drying up, little creeks had become mudholes. Farmers and gardeners despaired. But that

day the gray sky was filled with the promise of low, dark clouds, and so I sat on our back steps, hoping.

When the cool drops finally fell in dark, wide splashes on the cement, I stretched out my hands and turned up my face to feel their blessing. Hannah first swatted at her wispy hair, thinking the rain was a pesky bug. Then she held the skirt of her sundress out in front of her, watched spots of

water appear and opened her mouth wide and howled. At that moment I realized it had been dry for so long that she had never felt the rain before, and she was afraid.

Last summer, just three years later, the water tables were restored in one year. Some of the same people who had prayed for rain were sandbagging along their rivers, working desperately to save homes and possessions.

Whether scarce or plentiful, since the birth of humanity rain has been considered a sign of God's

I realized it had been dry for so long that she had never felt the rain before, and she was afraid.

graciousness. No technology has significantly altered our role as beggars for this gift of life. We who live in towns and cities may not be affected by rain as directly as rural people are, but the reality of our limits as human creatures remains. God sends the rain that gives life.

Water took on a new dimension with the coming of Jesus. John 7 mentions the Feast of Tabernacles. The week's festivities included pouring water down the steps of the temple. As the water ran across the stones, the people remembered that when the Israelites wandered in the desert and were thirsty, God commanded Moses to strike the rock with his staff and water flowed from it (Exodus 17:3-6). But more than a remembrance of the Exodus, the ritual pouring reflected the peoples' dependence on the land and the hope that God once again would remember to send the autumn rains.

On the last day of the festival Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38). That living water is the Holy Spirit, whose work flowed from the heart of Jesus into our lives.

As we are continually nurtured in faithful communities, we drink

Scarce or plentiful, since the birth of humanity rain has been considered a sign of God's graciousness.

in that same Spirit like thirsty soil—in baptism, in the Word spoken, in forgiveness gratefully received and given, in the bitter sweet body and blood of our Savior. Our lives then produce fruits that reflect conformity to the cross. So it is that we teach our young, comfort the

ill, strengthen those who feel they cannot go on. Problems may persist, but so will the blessings of the rain of the Spirit.

We remain beggars for God's goodness, unable to choose how the Spirit comes to us. Sometimes the Spirit comes in torrents, encourages us into extraordinary service, and creates floods of activity. At other times, we thirst for the Spirit like a parched earth. But even at those times—and maybe especially at those times—the smallest kindness, the single act of courage, the faithfulness of even one believer even more clearly ushers in the reign of God. In them we witness God's promises being fulfilled, and we are confident that the rain of the Spirit will continue to come and bless us. **G**

Mary E.F. Albing is pastor of United Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, North Dakota, where she shares her call with her husband Bob. They have two children, Hannah (7), and Daniel (9).

Letters, from inside front cover

"Almost" at the convention

special "thank you" for Triennial Convention material (February '94 WT). Circumstances changed and I had to cancel my plans to attend in Washington, D.C. with my friends. Meeting the executive board via publication was very nice! Along with the other important convention formation, I almost feel like I have been able to attend.

*Carol Jean Sandvik
Williston, North Dakota*

in "Letters"

have two observations concerning the snippet of a page "Letters."

The page allows me to continuously assess where I, as an individual, fit into the large population of women reduced to the acronym SELCA. Each month I find a different niche in the spectrum.

The second observation relates to letters expressing a different view from another writer's view. This is an appropriate avenue for discourse. However, it has been said that polemics need not dehumanize either antagonist. Certainly, when you go about the Lord's business, love must be the avenue of communication. With that in mind, indeed we should speak out when there are differences in thinking. However, we must guard against turning such statements into reflections on flaws in the writer's character.

A soft answer . . .

*Ruth Whiteside
Denver, Colorado*

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